

## THE SERVICE OF THE TEMPLE

By ELEANOR M. INGRAM

MADAME LA COMTESSE de St. Maury passed her hand carefully across her ermine muff, smoothing out the little tufts of lemon-color and black; she knew her *vis-à-vis* well enough not to risk refusal by over-great precipitation.

"For Easter morning," she proceeded calmly. "Which means, monsieur, that we have still six weeks; Désirée's marriage taking place two days after the festival. You will indulge me as you promised, is it not so?"

Chartiers shook his head with impatience.

"What you ask, madame, is the work of any stoneyard. Why come to me?"

"Because, *cher* monsieur, my chapel is a thing chic, unique. You understand; there could be no center more elegant, more expensive, than a sample of your marvelous art."

"Have your centerpiece cast in silver, then; that will cost you as much."

She raised her eyes in deprecation of the sarcasm.

"Consider the bad taste, the ostentation! No, you cannot refuse me, my dear Chartiers; you would pierce my heart."

"You want it plain——"

"Ornate as you choose, but empty; and signed with your name."

Madame la Comtesse was very handsome, much more so than the fragile girl beside her; but it was at

Désirée de St. Maury that the artist looked. Some expression had crossed her sensitive face that he was unable to interpret.

"This chapel," he remarked abruptly. "I was not aware you were so *dévote*, madame."

"Nor am I; it is the fad of the hour. But Désirée here, I believe she regrets the convent just left." She laughed amusedly, rising and holding out her hand. "It is agreed then, Monsieur Chartiers; and you will pardon me for separating you briefly from your adored demi-gods and Undines?"

"I wish you would release me from a promise blindly given."

She laughed again, and gathered up the trailing velvet and fur of her gown.

"Not on any account. Come, Désirée."

The young girl lingered an instant before Chartiers as he held open the door, raising to him her large, almost too large, dark eyes; eyes which contrasted markedly with the rippling auburn hair inherited from her mother.

"The cross you are going to carve, monsieur," she said with gentle seriousness, "will be seen by many people in the years to come. Do not make it all tragic; leave on it some of the dawn."

"Mademoiselle——"

She had gone; not hurriedly, but as one who has said all. Chartiers

heard the click of the elevator door behind her.

"Tragic," he repeated, "tragic."

The word seemed to him singularly exaggerated, over-colored; yet gathering recollections told him it simply expressed a fact. A tragedy; he had never considered that before; it was as if a pale myth suddenly grew vivid, instinct with life.

He shook his head with his habitual movement of impatience and turned back to the room. But a new idea halted him on the threshold.

"And they are marrying her to de Suresne! If she knew——"

It was a week later that Chartiers and Mademoiselle de St. Maury met before the glittering windows of a shop in the Rue de la Paix. She was on the way to her carriage, followed by a maid; he thought her even more fragile in the strong afternoon light.

They had never spoken before the morning in the studio, but both stopped.

"Your work is well, monsieur?" she asked, lifting her eyes to his.

"Mademoiselle, I have not yet begun."

"Ah, pardon; there is then plenty of time?"

"There is barely time," he admitted reluctantly. "I—I cannot find the mood."

She looked away, down the crowded avenue.

"I have heard it said, monsieur, that when you design a statue you create for yourself a closed room of thought, and live, read, hear only what makes that one idea draw breath."

"That is true."

"Then why not for this, monsieur?"

"Mademoiselle——"

But she had moved on; unhurriedly, tranquilly.

Chartiers stared after her dazedly, then turned to walk home. She was

right, this pale young *aristocrate*; she had expressed what he had known for a week, what fretted him. He had waited——"

Opposite him a bookseller's displayed a gaudily bound assortment of volumes; impulsively he crossed the street and went in.

The clerk heard his order with visible surprise, glancing furtively at the firm, rather cynical face of the customer.

"Monsieur desires it in velvet, in white morocco? It is for a gift?"

"No, no; anything. It makes no difference."

"*Bien*, monsieur. I will wrap up this copy?"

"No, give it to me."

"Monsieur?"

Chartiers took the little volume from him and dropped it into an overcoat pocket. One does not become the foremost sculptor of Europe before one is thirty-four without acquiring self-possession; even, be it said delicately, even to verging on arrogance.

Spring was coming early to Paris this year; already the parks boasted some daring or fatigued spirits who reposed on the iron benches. To one such seat Chartiers found his way and settled down to read.

At dusk some one spoke pleasantly to him, some one who, unnoticed, had shared the bench for the last hour.

"The book of monsieur——"

Chartiers regarded the extended volume.

"It slipped from my hand when the dusk fell," he explained, rather to himself than to his companion.

"Thank you, monsieur."

The little old man smiled at him with the same pleasantness that marked his voice.

"There is no dust upon it," he remarked, as the other mechanically passed his handkerchief over the surface. "I have no doubt *le bon Dieu*

will readily pardon the mind that was too attentive to watch the hand. But down that small street is an old church where I can always offer a quiet corner, when monsieur wills."

Renaud Chartiers opened his lips, and closed them again.

"Thank you," he repeated curtly, and turned away.

The tinted lamps were lit in his rooms when he entered; a gust of warm, heavily sweet air saluted him and brought the realization that the sharp damp wind had thoroughly chilled him.

"That perfume?" he demanded, stopping.

"Monsieur, it is the flowers arrived an hour since; there was no card."

He followed the servant's glance and saw them: a sheaf of tall snowy lilies in a pale glass vase, star-shaped silver cups that poured their fragrance lavishly, royally, on the rich air.

After a moment the man went out and closed the door. Still in his overcoat, Chartiers stood gazing at the lilies which he was irrationally and illogically certain had been sent by Désirée de St. Maury; sent as an aid, a suggestion.

Presently his eyes went to the opposite corner, where a cylinder of white marble sparkled with curious silvery glints under the lamplight. Gilbert d'Orézan had sent it to him from Italy a month before, accompanying it with a characteristic letter.

"It is a freak of nature," he had written. "Immortalize it, my Renaud; make of it some such delicate wonder as your Isis which set the world ablaze with delight. I fancy some mystic beauty is hidden in this moonlit marble for you to unveil—"

The usual plastic modeling repelled him strangely, but this—

Suddenly he flung off his coat and crossed the lily-scented room toward the stone.

Renaud Chartiers shut himself away from his world for a month. Visitors, and they were many, met at the door the simple statement that monsieur was engaged in his studio and begged to be excused. The information crept out that he was working, not in the facile, modern way, but as Phidias or Angelo must have wrought; with linked cunning of mind and hand.

He first broke this retreat three days before Easter; broke it to attend a *matinée musicale* at the house of a great lady for whom he cared nothing whatever.

"But you are thin; you have been working too hard, *mon cher* Monsieur Chartiers!" exclaimed his hostess, as she greeted him.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and made his way to a seat next Désirée de St. Maury. As she lifted her dark eyes to his the musicians touched the liquid fire of Anitra's Dance.

"I came here to see you," Chartiers said with his abrupt directness. "I have finished."

She answered nothing, but kept a gravely steady gaze on him.

"You understood, you have the gift of understanding, *mademoiselle*; you sent those lilies. Come; I know you are not happy, you were kind to show me your world where the outside does not matter. I thank you."

"I am not happy," she admitted quietly. "I hope you will be, *monsieur*."

Chartiers turned away his head; he had indeed grown thinner, but some more subtle change had smoothed away the slightly supercilious curve of lip and brow, leaving a new gentleness infinitely pleasant.

"I—I do not know. I am dazed,



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nervous. It seemed to me, *mademoiselle*, that there was no one in the world I could bear to meet to-day except you. And yet, I never felt more kindly to the rest. *Madame la Duchesse* is right, after all; I have been working too hard."

The strange panting music filled the pause, a breathless minor rush of chords. When it sank through silver arpeggios Désirée's voice came again.

"I have read an old rabbinical legend: that when the servers in the Temple came out into the light of day, its harshness was too much, after the finer radiance within. But when they learned to mingle the two, then they saw all the hidden treasures of the earth."

Chartiers looked at her with a quick flush. He waited for her to go on. But her lashes had fallen with her air of sweet finality,

as of having said all required, and he mutely acquiesced.

Neither spoke again during the morning. When the guests began to move out he followed her, replying mechanically to the laughing compliments and questions which assailed him on all sides.

It was the waif of some poorer street that confronted the guests of Madame la Duchesse on the muddy sidewalk; a tiny emaciated kitten shivering with cold and wet. Bewildered perhaps by the movement and rustle, the storm of chatter, it was standing helplessly terrified in their path. Just as it caught Chartiers' glance, he saw Désirée stoop and take it in her arms.

"A little cat!" she exclaimed, her charming voice all brimming with surprise and warm delight. "*Maman*, a little cat!"

And she turned, her face innocently, even childishly wondering and bright. For the first time Chartiers saw her real youth, her birthright of gayety, and realized what Madame de St. Maury had accomplished. Something grasped his heart sharply at the pity of it.

"Désirée!" her mother cried, amazed. "What are you doing? Set down that animal, I beg!"

"To leave it in the wet? Let me take it in the carriage, *maman*; see only how it is good."

In truth the kitten nestled to her contentedly, rubbing its gray head against the little gray glove. Madame de St. Maury bit her lip.

"Désirée, you will put down that detestable beast and cease this ridiculous scene!" she stated sharply, and moved toward the *coupé*.

The young girl drew a quick breath, then lifted her soft black eyes and saw Chartiers watching. Her expression cleared and warmed; taking a step toward him, she silently held out the ball of soiled

fur. And quite as simply he accepted it.

"*Merci*, mademoiselle," he said, with a meaning too deep for irony.

She smiled faintly, her unfailing comprehension meeting his thought; but there was no time for speech.

Perhaps no one could have explained less than Renaud Chartiers himself why he carried the shivering kitten to his workroom and fed it among the chips of silver-flecked marble. Afterward he put it on the velvet cushions of a couch in the salon and went to the telephone on his desk.

"I have finished," he said briefly, when Madame de St. Maury listened. "Send some one for your—centerpiece."

"Ah, *cher monsieur*! You will permit Monsieur de St. Maury the honor of arranging——"

Even unseen by any but the drowsy kitten, Chartiers colored deeply.

"It is a gift," he answered. "A caprice of mine to have it so. No; I speak seriously, nothing, madame."

He cut off her thanks and protestations very summarily, and went back to the studio where the work of his hands stood luminous with its own beauty.

There was nothing more to be done; he drew a chair before the pedestal and drifted into a reverie which swept thought far down the vistas of fancy into the real beyond the unreal.

It was in the rose and gray of Easter dawn that a sleepy servant admitted Chartiers to Madame de St. Maury's chapel. Nothing could have been considered more natural than the artist's wish to see that his work was placed to the best advantage. No one guessed the mingling loneliness that had sent him out so early.

The great house was still asleep, would be so for hours; but as Char-

tiers went up the aisle between the amethyst velvet pews a slight figure rose from before the altar. Suddenly he realized that the air was heavy with the fragrance of lilies.

"You have come to see it," Désirée said, her voice falling lightly on the hush. "You miss it, now."

"Yes," he answered as quietly, "I wanted to see."

They remained side by side looking at the heart of the place; a tall slender cross of translucent marble wreathed in carven lilies. Not a flat design, a lacy suggestion, but lilies of life-size that seemed scarcely to touch the surface on which they lay; snowy cups ready to be lifted, fragile, exquisite, that clustered over all in rich abundance and drooped with a pendant grace illusive of actual swaying.

"It is yours more than mine," he said, after a moment. "You taught me, mademoiselle."

"You knew before; I only reminded you," she responded dreamily.

"I never knew. Would you have given me the little cat a month ago, mademoiselle?"

As usual she replied to his thought rather than his words.

"You have changed. But it is not I who have taught you; it was—the service in the Temple."

"You smiled at the kitten the other day, and then I saw you were not born to be sad. Is it because they are giving you to Suresne—because you know what he is?"

The intensity of his gaze held hers; in her colorless face the large dark eyes seemed a meeting-place of shadows. The light, brightening steadily around them, touched her hair into threads of copper and flushed the marble lilies with rose.

"At the convent they called me Joie Désirée, because I laughed always and they loved me. But now, I

am to be married day after to-morrow."

"You submit——"

"There is no other way, monsieur."

He turned blindly toward his work, repeating inwardly the quaint love-name: *Joie Désirée*—Joy Desired. She also gazed before her, unconsciously pressing one hand against her heart. The lilies caught wavering ruddy reflections from the deepening sunrise, the chapel swam in faint fire.

Suddenly he turned to her with his old decisive movement. "They have no right, no claim; there is no purpose in it. I love you, you have taken my life in your fingers. If I can say this in this place, it cannot be a wrong I ask of you. Come with me; there is an old priest whom I know. The marriage might not be all legal, but they would not dare break it, and we could make it so. You gave me the kitten, Désirée. This is our hour, shall we let it go? Come, indeed I love you!"

She regarded him, and in her clear eyes something unfolded like a flower, then she mutely laid her hand in the one he held out. His closed firmly upon it and drew her to him.

"You are not afraid, Désirée; you will not regret?"

"If—the lilies——"

"They grow where we seek them; come!"

At the door they looked back in time to see the first sunbeam strike through the jeweled windows, transforming the chapel into a rippling sea of blended sapphire, ruby and amber in which flashed the central figure of brilliant and dazzling snow and silver.

"The treasures of the earth," breathed Renaud Chartiers. "Désirée, you——"

The great doors swung shut behind them.